

CHAPTER XXI

SOME FRENCH POEMS ON INSECTS

LAST year I gave a lecture on the subject of English poems about insects, with some reference to the old Greek poems on the same subject. But I did not then have an opportunity to make any reference to French poems upon the same subject, and I think that it would be a pity not to give you a few examples.

Just as in the case of English poems about insects, nearly all the French literature upon this subject is new. Insect poetry belongs to the newer and larger age of thought, to the age that begins to perceive the great truth of the unity of life. We no longer find, even in natural histories, the insect treated as a mere machine and unthinking organism; on the contrary its habits, its customs and its manifestation both of intelligence and instinct are being very carefully studied in these times, and a certain sympathy, as well as a certain feeling of respect or admiration, may be found in the scientific treatises of the greatest men who write about insect life. So, naturally, Europe is slowly returning to the poetical standpoint of the old Greeks in this respect. It is not improbable that keeping caged insects as pets may again become a Western custom, as it was in Greek times, when cages were made of rushes or straw for the little creatures. I suppose you have heard that the Japanese custom is very likely to become a fashion in America. If that should really happen, the fact would certainly have an effect upon poetry. I think that it is very likely to happen.

The French poets who have written pretty things about insects are nearly all poets of our own times. Some of them treat the subject from the old Greek standpoint—indeed the

beautiful poem of Heredia upon the tomb of a grasshopper is perfectly Greek, and reads almost like a translation from the Greek. Other poets try to express the romance of insects in the form of a monologue, full of the thought of our own age. Others again touch the subject of insects only in connection with the subject of love. I will give one example of each method, keeping the best piece for the last, and beginning with a pretty fancy about a dragon-fly.*

MA LIBELLULE

En te voyant, toute mignonne
Blanche dans ta robe d'azur,
Je pensais à quelque madone
Drapée en un pan de ciel pur;

Je songeais à ces belles saintes
Que l'on voyait, au temps jadis,
Sourire sur les vitres peintes,
Montrant du doigt le paradis;

Et j'aurais voulu, loin du monde
Qui passait frivole entre nous,
Dans quelque retraite profonde,
T'adorer seul à deux genoux.

This first part of the poem is addressed of course to a beautiful child, some girl between the age of childhood and womanhood:

“Beholding thee, Oh darling one, all white in thy azure dress, I thought of some figure of the Madonna robed in a shred of pure blue sky;

“I dreamed of those beautiful figures of saints whom one used to see in olden times smiling in the stained glass of church windows, and pointing upward to Paradise;

“And I could have wished to adore you alone upon my bended knees in some far hidden retreat, away from the frivolous world that passed between us.”

This little bit of ecstasy over the beauty and purity of a child is pretty, but not particularly original. However, it

* By François Fabié.

is only an introduction. Now comes the pretty part of the poem :

Soudain, un caprice bizarre
Change la scène et le décor,
Et mon esprit au loin s'égaré
Sur des grands prés d'azur et d'or,

Où, près de ruisseaux minuscules,
Gazouillants comme des oiseaux,
Se poursuivent les libellules,
Ces fleurs vivantes des roseaux.

Enfant, n'es-tu pas l'une d'elles,
Qui me suit pour me consoler ?
Vainement tu caches tes ailes :
Tu marches, mais tu sais voler.

Petite fée au bleu corsage,
Que je connus dès mon berceau,
En revoyant ton doux visage,
Je pense aux joncs de mon ruisseau !

Veux-tu qu'en amoureux fidèles
Nous revenions dans ces prés verts ?
Libellule, reprends tes ailes,
Moi, je brûlerai tous mes vers ;

Et nous irons, sous la lumière
D'un ciel plus frais et plus léger,
Chacun dans sa forme première,
Moi courir, et toi voltiger.

“Suddenly a strange fancy changes for me the scene and the scenery; and my mind wanders far away over great meadows of azure and gold,

“Where hard by tiny streams that murmur with a sound like voices of little birds, the dragon-flies, those living flowers of the reeds, chase each other at play.

“Child, art thou not one of those dragon-flies, following after me to console me? Ah, it is in vain that thou tryest to hide thy wings; thou dost walk, indeed, but well thou knowest how to fly!

“O little fairy with the blue corsage whom I knew even from the time I was a baby in the cradle; seeing again thy sweet face, I think of the rushes that border the little stream of my native village!

“Dost thou not wish that even now as faithful lovers we return to those green fields? O dragon-fly, take thy wings again, and I—I will burn all my poetry.

“And we shall go back, under the light of the sky more fresh and pure than this, each of us in the original form—I to run about, and thou to hover in the air as of yore.”

The sight of a child's face has revived for the poet very suddenly and vividly, the recollection of the village home, the green fields of childhood, the little stream where he used to play with the same little girl, sometimes running after the dragon-fly. And now the queer fancy comes to him that she herself is so like a dragon-fly—so light, graceful, spiritual! Perhaps really she is a dragon-fly following him into the great city, where he struggles to live as a poet, just in order to console him. She hides her wings, but that is only to prevent other people knowing. Why not return once more to the home of childhood, back to the green fields and the sun? “Little dragon-fly,” he says to her, “let us go back! Do you return to your beautiful summer shape, be a dragon-fly again, expand your wings of gauze; and I shall stop trying to write poetry. I shall burn my verses; I shall go back to the streams where we played as children; I shall run about again with the joy of a child, and with you beautifully flitting hither and thither as a dragon-fly.”

Victor Hugo also has a little poem about a dragon-fly, symbolic only, but quite pretty. It is entitled “La Demoiselle;” and the other poem was entitled, as you remember, “Ma Libellule.” Both words mean a dragon-fly, but not the same kind of dragon-fly. The French word “demoiselle,” which might be adequately rendered into Japanese by the term “ojōsan,” refers only to those exquisitely slender, graceful, slow-flitting dragon-flies known to the scientist by the name of Calopteryx. Of course you know the difference

by sight, and the reason of the French name will be poetically apparent to you.

Quand la demoiselle dorée
S'envole au départ des hivers,
Souvent sa robe diaprée,
Souvent son aile est déchirée
Aux mille dards des buissons verts.

Ainsi, jeunesse vive et frêle,
Qui, t'égarant de tous côtés,
Voles où ton instinct t'appelle,
Souvent tu déchires ton aile
Aux épines des voluptés.

“When, at the departure of winter, the gilded dragon-fly begins to soar, often her many coloured robe, often her wing, is torn by the thousand thorns of the verdant shrubs.

“Even so, O frail and joyous Youth, who, wandering hither and thither, in every direction, flyest wherever thy instinct calls thee—even so thou dost often tear thy wings upon the thorns of pleasure.”

You must understand that pleasure is compared to a rose-bush, whose beautiful and fragrant flowers attract the insects, but whose thorns are dangerous to the visitors. However, Victor Hugo does not use the word for rose-bush, for obvious reasons; nor does he qualify the plants which are said to tear the wings of the dragon-fly. I need hardly tell you that the comparison would not hold good in reference to the attraction of flowers, because dragon-flies do not care in the least about flowers, and if they happen to tear their wings among thorn bushes, it is much more likely to be in their attempt to capture and devour other insects. The merit of the poem is chiefly in its music and colour; as natural history it would not bear criticism. The most beautiful modern French poem about insects, beautiful because of its classical perfection, is, I think, a sonnet by Heredia, entitled “Épigramme funéraire”—that is to say, “Inscription for a Tombstone.” This is an exact imitation of Greek

sentiment and expression, carefully studied after the poets of the "Anthology." Several such Greek poems are extant, recounting how children mourned for pet insects which had died in spite of all their care. The most celebrated one among these I quoted in a former lecture—the poem about the little Greek girl Myro who made a tomb for her grasshopper and cried over it. Heredia has very well copied the Greek feeling in this fine sonnet:

Ici gît, Etranger, la verte sauterelle
 Que durant deux saisons nourrit la jeune Hellé,
 Et dont l'aile vibrant sous le pied dentelé
 Bruissait dans le pin, le cytise ou l'airielle.

Elle s'est tue, hélas! la lyre naturelle,
 La muse des guérets, des sillons et du blé;
 De peur que son léger sommeil ne soit troublé,
 Ah! passe vite, ami, ne pèse point sur elle.

C'est là. Blanche, au milieu d'une touffe de thym,
 Sa pierre funéraire est fraîchement posée.
 Que d'hommes n'ont pas eu ce suprême destin!

Des larmes d'un enfant sa tombe est arrosée,
 Et l'Aurore pieuse y fait chaque matin
 Une libation de gouttes de rosée.

"Stranger, here reposes the green grasshopper that the young girl Hellé cared for during two seasons,—the grasshopper whose wings, vibrating under the strokes of its serrated feet, used to resound in the pine, the trefoil and the whortle-berry.

"She is silent now, alas! that natural lyre, muse of the unsown fields, of the furrows, and of the wheat. Lest her light sleep should be disturbed, ah! pass quickly, friend! do not be heavy upon her.

"It is there. All white, in the midst of a tuft of thyme her funeral monument is placed, in cool shadow; how many men have not been able to have this supremely happy end!

"By the tears of a child the insect's tomb is watered; and the pious goddess of dawn each morning there makes

a libation of drops of dew.”

This reads very imperfectly in a hasty translation; the original charm is due to the perfect art of the form. But the whole thing, as I have said before, is really Greek, and based upon a close study of several little Greek poems on the same kind of subject. Little Greek girls thousands of years ago used to keep singing insects as pets, every day feeding them with slices of leek and with fresh water, putting in their little cages sprigs of the plants which they liked. The sorrow of the child for the inevitable death of her insect pets at the approach of winter, seems to have inspired many Greek poets. With all tenderness, the child would make a small grave for the insect, bury it solemnly, and put a little white stone above the place to imitate a grave-stone. But of course she would want an inscription for this tombstone—perhaps would ask some of her grown-up friends to compose one for her. Sometimes the grown-up friend might be a poet, in which case he would compose an epitaph for all time.

I suppose you perceive that the solemnity of this imitation of the Greek poems on the subject is only a tender mockery, a playful sympathy with the real grief of the child. The expression, “pass, friend,” is often found in Greek funeral inscriptions together with the injunction to tread lightly upon the dust of the dead. There is one French word to which I will call attention,—the word “guérets.” We have no English equivalent for this term, said to be a corruption of the Latin word “veractum,” and meaning fields which have been ploughed but not sown.

Not to dwell longer upon the phase of art indicated by this poem, I may turn to the subject of crickets. There are many French poems about crickets. One by Lamartine is known to almost every French child.

Grillon solitaire
Ici comme moi,
Voix qui sors de terre,
Ah! réveille-toi!

J'attise la flamme,
C'est pour t'égayer ;
Mais il manque une âme
Une âme au foyer.

Grillon solitaire,
Voix qui sors de terre,
Ah! réveille-toi,
Pour moi.

Quand j'étais petite
Comme ce berceau,
Et que Marguerite
Filait son fuseau ;
Quand le vent d'automne
Faisait tout gémir,
Ton cri monotone
M'aidait à dormir.

Grillon solitaire,
Voix qui sors de terre,
Ah! réveille-toi,
Pour moi.

Seize fois l'année
A compté mes jours;
Dans la cheminée
Tu niches toujours.
Je t'écoute encore
Aux froides saisons,
Souvenir sonore
Des vieilles maisons.

Grillon solitaire,
Voix qui sors de terre,
Ah! réveille-toi,
Pour moi.

It is a young girl who thus addresses the cricket of the hearth, the house cricket. It is very common in country houses in Europe. This is what she says:

“Little solitary cricket, all alone here just like myself, little voice that comes up out of the ground, ah, awake for my sake!

“I am stirring up the fires, that is just to make you comfortable; but there lacks a presence by the hearth; a soul to keep me company.

“Solitary cricket, voice that issues from the ground, awaken, for my sake.

“When I was a very little girl, as little as that cradle in the corner of the room, then, while Margaret our servant sat there spinning, and while the autumn wind made everything moan outside, your monotonous cry used to help me to fall asleep.

“Solitary cricket, voice that issues from the ground, awaken, for my sake.

“Now I am sixteen years of age and you are still nestling in the chimneys as of old. I can hear you still in the cold season,—like a sound—memory,—a sonorous memory of old houses.

“Solitary cricket, voice that issues from the ground, awaken, O awaken for my sake.”

I do not think this pretty little song needs any explanation; I would only call your attention to the natural truth of the fancy and the feeling. Sitting alone by the fire in the night, the maiden wants to hear the cricket sing, because it makes her think of her childhood, and she finds happiness in remembering it.

So far as mere art goes, the poem of Gautier on the cricket is very much finer than the poem of Lamartine, though not so natural and pleasing. But as Gautier was the greatest master of French verse in the nineteenth century, not excepting Victor Hugo, I think that one example of his poetry on insects may be of interest. He was very poor, compared with Victor Hugo; and he had to make his living by writing for newspapers, so that he had no time to become the great poet that nature intended him to be. However, he did find time to produce one volume of highly finished poetry, which is probably the most perfect verse of the nineteenth century, if not the most perfect verse ever made by a French poet; I mean the “*Émaux et Camées*.” But

the little poem which I am going to read to you is not from the "Émaux et Camées."

Souffle, bise! Tombe à flots, pluie!
 Dan mon palais tout noir de suie
 Je ris de la pluie et du vent;
 En attendant que l'hiver fuie,
 Je reste au coin du feu, rêvant.

C'est moi qui suis l'esprit de l'âtre!
 Le gaz, de sa langue bleuâtre,
 Lèche plus doucement le bois.
 La fumée, en filet d'albâtre,
 Monte et se contourne à ma voix.

La bouilloire rit et babille;
 La flamme aux pieds d'argent sautille
 En accompagnant ma chanson;
 La bûche de duvet s'habille;
 La sève bout dans le tison.

Pendant la nuit et la journée
 Je chante sous la cheminée;
 Dans mon langage de grillon
 J'ai, des rebuts de son aînée,
 Souvent consolé Cendrillon.

Quel plaisir! prolonger sa veille,
 Regarder la flamme vermeille
 Prenant à deux bras le tison,
 A tous les bruits prêter l'oreille,
 Entendre vivre la maison!

Tapi dans sa niche bien chaude,
 Sentir l'hiver qui pleure et rôde,
 Tout blême, et le nez violet,
 Tâchant de s'introduire en fraude
 Par quelque fente du volet!

This poem is especially picturesque, and is intended to give us the comfortable sensations of a winter night by the fire, and the amusement of watching the wood burn and of hearing the kettle boiling. You will find that the French

has a particular quality of lucid expression; it is full of clearness and colour.

“Blow on, cold wind! pour down, O rain. I, in my soot-black palace laugh at both rain and wind; and while waiting for winter to pass I remain in my corner by the fire dreaming.

“It is I that am really the spirit of the hearth! The gaseous flame licks the wood more softly with its bluish tongue when it hears me; and the smoke rises up like an alabaster thread, and curls itself about (or twists) at the sound of my voice.

“The kettle chuckles and chatters; the golden-footed flame leaps, dancing to the accompaniment of my song (or in accompaniment to my song); the great log covers itself with down, the sap boils in the wooden embers. (“Duvet,” meaning “down,” refers to the soft fluffy white ash that forms upon the surface of burning wood.)

“All night and all day I sing below the chimney. Often in my cricket-language, I have consoled Cinderella for the snubs of her elder sister.

“Ah, what pleasure to sit up at night, and watch the crimson flames embracing the wood (or hugging the wood) with both arms at once, and to listen to all the sounds, and to hear the life of the house!

“Nestling in one’s good warm nook, how pleasant to hear Winter, who weeps and prowls round about the house outside, all wan and blue-nosed with cold, trying to smuggle itself inside some chink in the shutter!”

Of course this does not give us much about the insect itself, which remain invisible in the poem, just as it really remains invisible in the house where the voice is heard. Rather does the poem express the feelings of the person who hears the cricket.

When we come to the subject of grasshoppers, I think that the French poets have done much better than the English. There are many poems on the field grasshopper; I scarcely know which to quote first. But I think you would be pleased with a little composition by the celebrated French

painter, Jules Breton. Like Rossetti he was both painter and poet; and in both arts he took for his subjects by preference things from country life. This little poem is entitled "Les Cigales." The word "cigales," though really identical with our word "cicala," seldom means the same thing. Indeed the French word may mean several different kinds of insects, and it is only by studying the text that we can feel quite sure what sort of insect is meant.

Lorsque dans l'herbe mûre aucun épi ne bouge,
Qu'à l'ardeur des rayons crépite le froment,
Que le coquelicot tombe languissamment
Sous le faible fardeau de sa corolle rouge,

Tous les oiseaux de l'air ont fait taire leurs chants;
Les ramiers paresseux, au plus noir des ramures,
Somnolents, dans les bois, ont cessé leurs murmures,
Loin du soleil muet incendiant les champs.

Dans le blés, cependant, d'intrépides cigales
Jetant leurs mille bruits, fanfare de l'été,
Ont frénétiquement et sans trêve agité
Leurs ailes sur l'airain de leurs folles cymbales.

Frémoissantes, debout sur les longs épis d'or,
Virtuoses qui vont s'éteindre avant l'automne,
Elles poussaient au ciel leur hymne monotone,
Qui dans l'ombre des nuits retentissait encor.

Et rien n'arrêtera leurs cris intarissables;
Quand on les chassera de l'avoine et des blés.
Elles émigreront sur les buissons brûlés
Qui se meurent de soif dans les déserts de sable.

Sur l'arbuste effeuillé, sur les chardons flétris
Qui laissent s'envoler leur blanche chevelure,
On reverra l'insecte à la forte encolure,
Pleine d'ivresse, toujours s'exalter dans ses cris;

Jusqu'à ce qu'ouvrant l'aile en lambeaux arrachée,
Exaspéré, brûlant d'un feu toujours plus pur,
Son oeil de bronze fixe et tendu vers l'azur,
Il expire en chantant sur la tige séchée.

For the word "encolure" we have no English equivalent; it means the line of the neck and shoulder—sometimes the general appearance or shape of the body.

"When in the ripening grain field not a single ear of wheat moves; when in the beaming heat the corn seems to crackle; when the poppy languishes and bends down under the feeble burden of its scarlet corolla,

"Then all the birds of the air have hushed their songs; even the indolent doves, seeking the darkest part of the foliage in the tree, have become drowsy in the woods, and have ceased their cooing, far from the fields, which the silent sun is burning.

"Nevertheless, in the wheat, the brave grasshoppers uttering their thousand sounds, a trumpet flourish of summer, have continued furiously and unceasingly to smite their wings upon the brass of their wild cymbal.

"Quivering as they stand upon the long gold ears of the grain, master musicians who must die before the coming of Fall, they sound to heaven their monotonous hymn, which re-echoes even in the darkness of the night.

"And nothing will check their inexhaustible shrilling. When chased away from the oats and from the wheat, they will migrate to the scorched bushes which die of thirst in the wastes of sand.

"Upon the leafless shrubs, upon the dried-up thistles, which let their white hair fall and float away, there the sturdily-built insect can be seen again, filled with enthusiasm, ever more and more excited as he cries,

"Until, at last, opening his wings, now rent into shreds, exasperated, burning more and more fiercely in the frenzy of his excitement, and with his eyes of bronze always fixed motionlessly upon the azure sky, he dies in his song upon the withered grain."

This is difficult to translate at all satisfactorily, owing to the multitude of images compressed together. But the idea expressed is a fine one—the courage of the insect challenging the sun, and only chanting more and more as the

heat and the thirst increase. The poem has, if you like, the fault of exaggeration, but the colour and music are very fine; and even the exaggeration itself has the merit of making the image more vivid.

It will not be necessary to quote another text; we shall scarcely have the time; but I want to translate to you something of another poem upon the same insect by the modern French poet Jean Aicard. In this poem, as in the little poem by Gautier, which I quoted to you, the writer puts his thought in the mouth of the insect, so to say—that is, makes the insect tell its own story:—

“I am the impassive and noble insect that sings in the summer solstice from the dazzling dawn all the day long in the fragrant pine-wood. And my song is always the same, regular as the equal course of the season and of the sun. I am the speech of the hot and beaming sun, and when the reapers, weary of heaping the sheaves together, lie down in the lukewarm shade, and sleep and pant in the ardour of noonday—then more than at any other time do I utter freely and joyously that double-echoing strophe with which my whole body vibrates. And when nothing else moves in all the land round about, I palpitate and loudly sound my little drum. Otherwise the sunlight triumphs; and in the whole landscape nothing is heard but my cry,—like the joy of the light itself.

“Like a butterfly I take up from the hearts of the flowers that pure water which the night lets fall into them like tears. I am inspired only by the almighty sun. Socrates listened to me; Virgil made mention of me. I am the insect especially beloved by the poets and by the bards. The ardent sun reflects himself in the globes of my eyes. My ruddy bed, which seems to be powdered like the surface of fine ripe fruit, resembles some exquisite key-board of silver and gold, all quivering with music. My four wings, with their delicate net-work of nerves, allow the bright down upon my black back to be seen through their transparency. And like a star upon the forehead of some divinely inspired

poet, three exquisitely mounted rubies glitter upon my head.”

These are fair examples of the French manner of treating the interesting subject of insects in poetry. If you should ask me whether the French poems are better than the English, I should answer, “In point of workmanship, yes;—in point of feeling, no.” The real value of such examples to the student should be emotional, not descriptive. I think that the Japanese poems on insects, though not comparable in point of mere form with some of the foreign poems which I have quoted, are better in another way—they come nearer to the true essence of poetry. For the Japanese poets have taken the subject of insects chiefly for the purpose of suggesting human emotion; and that is certainly the way in which such a subject should be used. Remember that this is an age in which we are beginning to learn things about insects which could not have been even imagined fifty years ago, and the more that we learn about these miraculous creatures, the more difficult does it become for us to write poetically about their lives, or about their possible ways of thinking and feeling. Probably no mortal man will ever be able to imagine how insects think or feel or hear or even see. Not only are their senses totally different from those of animals, but they appear to have a variety of special senses about which we cannot know anything at all. As for their existence, it is full of facts so atrocious and so horrible as to realize most of the imaginations of old about the torments of hell. Now, for these reasons to make an insect speak in poetry—to put one’s thoughts, so to speak, into the mouth of an insect—is no longer consistent with poetical good judgment. No; we must think of insects either in relation to the mystery of their marvellous lives, or in relation to the emotion which their sweet and melancholy music makes within our minds. The impressions produced by hearing the shrilling of crickets at night or by hearing the storm of cicadae in summer woods—those impressions, indeed, are admirable subjects for poetry, and will continue to be for all time.

When I lectured to you long ago about Greek and English poems on insects, I told you that nearly all the English poems on the subject were quite modern. I still believe that I was right in this statement, as a general assertion; but I have found one quaint poem about a grasshopper, which must have been written about the middle of the seventeenth century or, perhaps a little earlier. The date of the author's birth and death are respectively 1618 and 1658. His name, I think, you are familiar with—Richard Lovelace, author of many amatory poems, and of one especially famous song, "To Lucasta, on going to the Wars"—containing the celebrated stanza—

Yet this inconstancy is such
As thou too shalt adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.

Well, as I said, this man wrote one pretty little poem on a grasshopper, which antedates most of the English poems on insects, if not all of them.

THE GRASSHOPPER

O thou that swing'st upon the waving hair
Of some well-fillèd oaten beard,
Drunk every night with a delicious tear
Dropt thee from heaven, where now thou wert rear'd!

The joys of earth and air are thine entire,
That with thy feet and wings dost hop and fly;
And when thy poppy works, thou dost retire
To thy carved acorn-bed to lie.

Up with the day, the Sun thou welcom'st then,
Sport'st in the gilt plaits of his beams,
And all these merry days mak'st merry men,
Thyself, and melancholy streams.

A little artificial, this poem written at least two hundred and fifty years ago; but it is pretty in spite of its artifice. Some of the conceits are so quaint that they must be explained. By the term "oaten beard," the poet means an

ear of oats; and you know that the grain of this plant is furnished with very long hair, so that many poets have spoken of the bearded oats. You may remember in this connection Tennyson's phrase "the bearded barley" in "The Lady of Shalott," and Longfellow's term "bearded grain" in his famous poem about the Reaper Death. When a person's beard is very thick, we say in England to-day "a full beard," but in the time of Shakespeare they used to say "a well-filled beard"—hence the phrase in the second line of the first stanza.

In the third line the term "delicious tear" means dew,—which the Greeks called the tears of the night, and sometimes the tears of the dawn; and the phrase "drunk with dew" is quite Greek—so we may suspect that the author of this poem had been reading the Greek Anthology. In the third line of the second stanza the word "poppy" is used for sleep—a very common simile in Elizabethan times, because from the poppy flower was extracted the opiate which enables sick persons to sleep. The Greek authors spoke of poppy sleep. "And when thy poppy works," means, when the essence of sleep begins to operate upon you, or more simply, when you sleep. Perhaps the phrase about the "carved acorn-bed" may puzzle you; it is borrowed from the fairy-lore of Shakespeare's time, when fairies were said to sleep in little beds carved out of acorn shells; the simile is used only by way of calling the insect a fairy creature. In the second line of the third stanza you may notice the curious expression about the "gilt plaits" of the sun's beams. It was the custom in those days, as it still is in these, for young girls to plait their long hair; and the expression "gilt plaits" only means braided or plaited golden hair. This is perhaps a Greek conceit; for classic poets spoke of the golden hair of the Sun God as illuminating the world. I have said that the poem is a little artificial, but I think you will find it pretty, and even the whimsical similes are "precious" in the best sense.